

Kamal Kahani: A Book on Punjabi Folktales

By Hassnain Ghayoor

Those who think folktales are a potent force for development of culture; Mian Kamal Deen is a big shot for them. As the vivacity of rural life is evaporating besides other peculiar art forms the art of story telling has also reached almost the edge. It is precisely this moment in life of decaying village that has led a many to appreciate the value of stories told by Mian Kamal. Mian Kamal was an erudite and quintessential storyteller with all the qualities of style, craft, and diction. It might have gone to unreachable vale if there was no commitment and hard work of Saeed Bhutta.

Bhutta, Assistant Professor, teaches Punjabi Language and Literature at University of the Punjab. He is short story writer and a researcher par excellence with special knack for folklore-specifically folktales. He has been working on this project since 1991 and has produced a number of articles including his recent compilation of 14 stories *Kamal Kahani*. Most of the stories included in this book are those already published in widely circulated Punjabi monthlies; Punjabi Adab, Maan Boli, Pancham, and Sahat.

He spent most of his life in villages along the rivers Jehlum and Chenab with infrequent visits of plains along the river Ravi. He was in class two when he wrote his first poem and was in class five when his teacher banded him and he left the school once for all.

After reading *Kamal Kahani* for the first time I could understand the meaning of what Octavio Paz, a Mexican writer, said in his Noble Lecture “modernity is the most ancient antiquity”. It is the centuries old tradition of story telling that makes these stories impeccable, writes

Bhutta in preface of the book. *Kamal Kahani* is a page-turner phenomenon in the true sense of the word and Mian Kamal Deen is the most ancient modern.

In view of the compiler of the book the modern Punjabi prose is more a replica of Urdu and Persian in terms of style, craft, and diction. This gap can be bridged only when we would learn respecting persons like Mian Kamal. He also urges researchers to restore the essence of Punjabi prose and says that this book is only a step taken in this direction.

In a story that is Gamann Sachyar, Gamann is the protagonist and Sachyar (who never lied) a title he earns with the passage of time from the people. A man he was and a metaphor he has become. Speaking truth is allegoric to Gamann. So he was called Gamann Sachyar. The story speaks volumes of Punjabi cultural and esthetic sensibilities.

It really did help me regain the lost pride in my ancestors. It seems after reading this story that I know whatever happened in the past and even that never happened.

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